

Protector (parts 13-17)

by Serendipity

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Summary: How much is Willow willing to sacrifice in order to fulfill her destiny?

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>parts 13-17

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>distribution: Y'all know me. I say yes. Just ask beforehand so I know.

>disclaimer: the characters belong to Joss Whedon

>rating: PG-13 (language, violence and content)

>author's notes: Oz doesn't exist...again (I'm SORRY!!!) and uhm..Oh, this

>is my take on what fourth season would be like for 'Buffy' and for the new series

>'Angel'. (meaning, all of the previous seasons are fair game. I haven't seen Grad2 yet, though, so don't worry about that type of spoilage. Angel is in L.A.) Only difference: (big one) the Scooby Gang is still in high school. So, the events of season 3 took place their junior year. Oh, and lastly, for those who have read it and are wondering, this is totally unrelated to one of my other stories, When Stars Collide. :) Feedback is, as always, adored, highly appreciated, very motivational and always responded to.

>dedication: to everyone who's ever wanted to have something dedicated to them but never has,

>this story is wholeheartedly for you.

>***** <p>

Part 13

Amy winced as Cordelia pulled the bandage tightly around her hand, effectively staunching the blood flow.

"That was close," Julian said, his blue eyes had returned to their natural pale color as opposed to the burning brightness they'd

>exhibited during the spell. <p>

"I don't like the way she just stalked out of here, though," Amy muttered under her breath as she inspected the dressing on her

>injured hand. <p>

"She's fine," Whistler reaffirmed with a nod, "I'd know it if she wasn't. She's alive."

"Being alive and being sane are two entirely different things," Giles looked as if he'd aged nearly 10 years in the previous 15

>minutes, "It seemed odd to me as well." <p>

"It might seem odd, but she's still going strong and doing what she needs to," Closing his eyes for a moment, Julian smiled,

>"And from what I can tell, she just got inâ€|" <p>

**

Banging loudly on the door, Willow sighed and waited impatiently to be let in.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me."

Turning around slowly, she smiled cattily at the speaker and pointed to the body of the Slayer slung causally over her shoulder,

>"Spike, look what I brought you. A house warming gift." <p>

"And what the fuck do you think you're doing, Pet?" He smiled at her in such a way that she could see the cold depths of his

>blue eyes, untouched by the expression on his face, "Do you really think that I'm that stupid? You think I'm going to fall for

whatever fairy glamour that old librarian has cooked up to make you look like a vampire? Pleaseâ€|give me a little bit of credit

>here." <p>

The warmth in her own demeanor immediately changed as well and she abruptly dumped Buffy's body to the floor, "Don't be

>rude, Spike." She walked up to him boldly until they were nose to nose, "I'm not Dru and I'm not one of your random whores.
I may

look like that incredibly pathetic teenager you locked up in the factory when you were on one of your bullshit drunken

>binges but rest assured, I'm not." <p>

He rolled his eyes, bored but still humoring her, "And just who the hell might you be then?"

"Why don't you ask nicely?" She responded coolly before giving him a coy wink.

Abruptly, he geared back, his hand closed tightly into a fist, and swung into her jaw.

With lightening speed, she caught his wrist and twisted it viciously before flinging him into a wall.

Growling in anger, he stumbled backwards on his long black duster, attempting to get his footing as she steadily walked forward and grabbed him by the neck, hoisting him a few feet up, holding him firmly against the cold brick surface. <p>

"Hey, that looked kinda familiar. Maybe it's because I taught it to you, moron."

Slipping into game face, he clawed at her arm and grabbed a fistful of her hair before she brought her other hand up and punched him hard in the nose, forcing him to release her. <p>

"Try it again and I'll do what I did to you when we were in Vienna." She smiled at him, the challenge in her eyes obvious.

For a brief instant, something undefinable flickered across his dark blue eyes before quickly vanishing, "Yeah right," He drawled, eyeing her leeringly as blood dripped down his face, "And just what might that have been?" <p>

"There was more than one reason we called you 'Spike'," She whispered darkly, "And just think; Dru isn't here to save you this time." <p>

He shivered at her words involuntarily and she smiled and tightened her grip, "Don't believe me? I can prove it if you want."

His eyes glittered as he sensed an end to the game, "So how exactly do you want me to refer to you thenâ€| Grandmother?" He asked hoarsely. <p>

Growling, she kneed him hard in the groin before dropping his convulsing form to the floor, "You know I fucking hate that," she

responded through gritted teeth as she stepped over him and picked up Buffy, "Get up and open the door. I may have been the Master's bitch but I'm sure as hell not yours."

Gingerly rising to his feet, Spike withdrew a long silver key.

"TouchÃ©." <p>

**

Somewhat bored and entirely forgotten, Xander Harris wandered through Cordelia's apartment aimlessly. He had been relegated to slayer sitting earlier in the night, but now that it

was nearly 4am, the girls were safely tucked away to bed.

Unfortunately, with his two best friends in the world missing, he couldn't find the peace of mind to do the same.

"Xander!" He heard a tearful voice call from the other room, "Xander! Are you still around here?"

Turning around, he quickly entered the small lounge that doubled as a temporary bedroom for 4 of the Slayers-in Training.

"Hey? What's up?" He whispered softly, while kneeling down.

The delicate blonde girl sat up in her sleeping bag, looking somewhat bewildered and frightened.

"Xander, I was just so scared!" She whimpered, her arms outstretched.

Carefully, he cradled her in his arms and stroked her hair comfortingly, "It's okay, Teri. Nightmare?"

"Yeah," She nodded, her eyes still brimming with unshed tears, "I was fighting this huge vampire with Emma and we were
>winning until suddenly she disappeared and then it was only me and I couldn't handle him on my own. I was so scared." <p>

"Hey, vampires are nothing to be scared of. I mean, I've seen them in action and trust me, they're scary LOOKING but
>usually dumb as a rock. Take Angel, for instance." <p>

She giggled.

"Besides, it was just a dream. I mean, if vampires ever tried to invade this place, you'd have Emma and Heather and Robin and

>Tracy and all the others out in seconds. And even without them, there's always the Watchers, "He paused, "Okay, forget I said

that. Uhm, worse comes to worse, Amy is two doors down and she knows some awesome spells."

"Thanks, Xander," she stared up at him adoringly, "You're so great."

"Hey no problem. It's something I've gotten used to," He winked at her playfully, "You okay?"

"Yup," she nodded.

"Well, I'll be right down the hall if you need me."

"Okay." She whispered, giving him a timid wave as he slowly shut the door to the room.

As soon as he was gone, she stood up and wiped away the tears in her eyes.

"Men are so damn gullible," she muttered under her breath, stooping to pick up her makeup bag, "This is gonna be so easy. On
>to phase 2." <p>

** Surveying her surroundings, Willow sighed, "You certainly have gone downhill since Prague, haven't you? Why not just go >back there. America is so dull." <p>

Spike cast her a sideways glance, "I thought you rather liked it."

"I never liked it here," She turned towards him, "I was here because of the Master. America WOULD have been so much >more fun if Angel hadn't brought the Slayer to spoil it all." <p>

"Speaking of which, would you like to see our honored guest?" the peroxide vampire gestured down a small passage.

"I'd love to," Willow responded, still supporting Buffy's body, "First though, I'd like to see my room."

"Will you be staying long?"

"Not fucking likely. I'd like to stick around to see that head Watcher and a few of his underlings die slowly but after that, I'm

>going to Paris." <p>

"Underlings? Which underlings?" Spike asked curiously, "Those bumbling fools are harmless."

"Not them, moron. They're actually stupid enough to have brought almost every Slayer in Training with them."

"So?" Spike shrugged, "You can kill them, but they breed like rabbits. More will keep popping up all over the place."

"Yes, but how much fun would it be for the Watcher's Council to have to deal with a Slayer called when she was 5 as opposed >to 15? These girls are ripe for the picking. When I kill them, there won't be another Slayer capable of being called for at least
ten years." She sighed rudely and blew an errant strand of red hair out of her eyes, "I can see that you're still as stupid as you >were when I last saw you, Spike." <p>

"Well ducks, I wasn't the one who got herself staked, now than am I?"

"There's a first time for everything now then isn't there Spikey?" She gave him a sugar coated smile and the teasing light in his

>eyes darkened. <p>

"You can have the main suite."

"You're too kind."

**

"Ahem."

Looking up from the dusty book on African mythology he'd been absent-mindedly thumbing through, Xander's mouth fell

>open. <p>

"So, we're finally alone," Teri smiled up at him as becomingly as possible and blinked her mascara-coated lashes.

"Uhm, aren't you supposed to be asleep? No more nightmares, right? Better, uhm, goâ€¦.Giles'll get pissed off. Little slayers
>need their sleep." He regarded her warily and took a step back. He hadn't been sure if it was just his imagination but he had
been getting very odd signals from this slayer all night. The incident with the nightmare had made him think he was imagining her
>odd behavior but for once, Xander Harris' instincts had been right on the money. <p>

"Oh, I don't think anyone's getting any sleep tonight," She flipped her long blonde hair over her shoulder and sauntered over to
>him as gracefully as possible in the heels she'd managed to 'borrow' from Cordelia's closet. <p>

Dropping his book on the couch, Xander abruptly scooted to the other side, putting the piece of furniture directly between
>them, "No sleep? We-well, that's, uhm, that's a bad thing, right? Sleep is good. I think you could definitely use some. Are you

okay? You're acting a littleâ€¦.weird."

"You should be happy, Xander. I've chosen YOU." She smiled at him.

"Chosen, huh?" He grinned back at her gamely, trying to hide his abject terror. They pounce as soon as they can smell the
>fearâ€¦. > "That kinda reminds me of Buffy, you knowâ€¦like, she being chosen and allâ€¦kinda funny, huh? Gee, I wonder
where she is right nowâ€¦.oh wait, I think I can hear her calling meâ€¦I'd better go into theâ€¦uhâ€¦the other room and see if
>she's back." <p>

With that, he dashed out of the room, top speed.

Entirely unfazed, Teri stared after him, "Menâ€¦.they can run, but they can't hideâ€¦" tripping slightly over her heels, she loped

>after him, a determined gleam in her dark blue eyes. <p>

**

Bleary eyed and hungry, Angel tried to pry open his blood-encrusted eyes, wincing only slightly at the wound on his head.

If I can just see where I am, exactly, then I have a good chance of seeing where Spike got careless. >

He had just managed his goal when the door clicked open.

"He's right in here." The cocky British accent made Angel wince involuntarily and he fought the urge to close his eyes again,
>Now what? > <p>

"Good, I've been looking forward to this."

Immediately, his eyes widened and he stood up as best he could. It

can't beâ€| >

Without thinking, he rasped her name, "Willow?"

As if out of a dream, she stepped into his field of view, her figure filling him with relief and fear at the same time.

"Angel," She smiled at him, "You're awake."

Angel felt his heart fall to his feet as bitter grief overwhelmed him. The simple tone of her voice told him all he needed to know.

Willow, his Willow, was gone.

"I will * kill * you for this Spike." His voice was low and deadly, "Beat me, torture me, stake me, I don't care. I've been to hell

>and I've come back once. I'll do it again and when I do, you'll die for turning her." <p>

The blonde vampire opened his mouth to respond but Willow merely waved him off and he fell into silence.

Her dark green eyes sparkling viciously, she sauntered up to him, "Brave words from a guy who's all chained up." She cocked >her head to one side and smirked, "Besides, what makes you think that Spike did this to me?" <p>

For a brief moment, his mind flooded with hope that perhaps this girl wasn't Willow but instead her Doppelganger and that >Spike had somehow managed to do something only slightly less evil by opening up a portal between their worlds again. <p>

As if sensing his thoughts, the redhead leaned forward, "I'm not her, either. Do I act the same as she did? That red haired >bimbo from the alternate timeline?" <p>

As much as he hated to admit it, she was right. While the alternate vampire Willow had been cruel and cunning, she was also >somewhat flaky. Almost like a milder version of Dru. This vampire Willow seemed much more cognizant of her surroundings. <p>

Making her all the more dangerous.

"So I guess the question is, Angel, who am I?" She met his tortured dark eyes unflinchingly, "Because I want you to realize that >we HAVE met before." <p>

"Willow, I'm so sorry. You'll never know how sorry I am." He murmured, looking into her eyes, "The world lost something

>beautiful today an-," <p>

Slipping into game face, the former hacker let out a feral growl and punched him hard.

Reeling back at the force of her blow, he blinked several times to refocus his ailing sight.

Smiling sweetly again, she shook her head, "Naughty, Angel. When I ask you a question, I expect you to answer. Please TRY
>to leave the guilty brooding for later. I know it's hard for you, but for my sake, do it. Be good to mommy and she'll be good to

you."

His eyes widened and he gasped sharply.

"Uh oh," she feigned disappointment, "I think I just gave it awayâ€|"

"Darla." He spat her name in a dull voice, "How?"

"Miss me after all this time and all you can ask is 'How'? You sure do know how to make a girl feel special, lover."

"You want to play games, Darla? Fine, we can stand here all night and play games."

"Ask me the right questions and I'll give you the right answers." She countered smoothly.

"Why Willow?" He looked at her; his brooding gaze had shifted to barely concealed hatred, "Why take her?"

"Well if that isn't the million dollar question? Very good Angel, I didn't think you had it in you."

When he didn't respond, she let out a dramatic sigh.

"Why her? Why not?" She snarled at him, "There are a few things you should never forget, Angel. One of which is that
>NOTHING in this world is exactly as it seems. I chose Willow because for all her mousiness on the outside, she's actually an
immensely powerful host in the inside. I had a conduit to her and I took the opportunity."

"You entered her through some kind of a spell and chose her because she's a strong witch." He stated, shaking his head in
>disgust. <p>

"No," She responded sharply and grabbed his chin, forcing him to look her in the eyes, "I chose this host because she who was
>on the edge of Immortality anyway. Ever bother to ask what, exactly, Willow would be helping Whistler research? Or why
she'd even be needed in such a dangerous area when your Protector was already so skilled with a computer? Quite a
>coincidence, don't you think?" <p>

Angel felt her words, and their implication, hit him like a physical blow.

"Noâ€|"

The pain that rose from his chest was worse than anything Spike had inflicted on him. As the numbing ache spread to his
>extremities, his knees started to buckle. <p>

"That's right, lover. Less than a week from today, Willow Ann Rosenberg was going to be the next Immortal Watcher."

"Noâ€|" he whispered again, trying to block out her words.

"She was your advocate and your savior long before she was ever your Protector. She got you out of hell and she gave her life
>for you." She smiled triumphantly, "Too bad you didn't give a shit. If you had, maybe she'd still be alive." <p>

Engulfed in his sorrow, Angel didn't have the energy to look at her anymore. He bowed his head in shame and grief and let go
>of the physical world. His body dangled upright, supported solely by the chains that attached his wrists to the ceiling. <p>

"How's the pain, lover?" She murmured the question into his ear, "Does it hurt a lot? I hope so. You know how much I love
>pain." Straightening up, she turned to look at Spike, "Less messy than beating him and yet, deliciously more effective!" <p>

Smiling brightly, she headed towards the door, "I feel so much better now, I think I'm going to bed."

Allowing her to pass by first, Spike silently followed her out.

"Until tomorrow night, darling!" She called over her shoulder.

The door bolted shut, blocking out the gentle light from the corridor.

Angel trembled alone in the darkness.

Part 14

Part 14

> <p>

"Yes, so perhaps if we just-, " Giles paused as the door suddenly whipped open and Xander ducked inside, firmly closing and
>locking it behind him. <p>

"Hi guys!" The dark haired boy turned to look at the group assembled behind him, "Uhm, don't mind me. Pretend like I'm not
>even here!" <p>

"Shouldn't you be asleep, Xander?" Giles asked curiously.

Amy yawned as if to accentuate his question, "Yeah, it's kinda lateâ€|earlyâ€|whateverâ€|"

"Nearly morning." Julian clarified, the only one in the group who didn't look even remotely tired.

"Sleep? Who can sleep when there's work to be done?" Xander let out a nervous laugh, "Especially when I'm a workin' kinda
>guy. Love to work. A great worker. Work Work Work, day and night. Heck, my middle name is work. Xander 'work'
Harris. That's me."

Giles looked mildly disturbed and Amy simply rolled her eyes.

'So yeah, I'm here to help as much as possible. What do you need me for? Some extra brains? Brawn?" He started to look
>desperate, "Bait??" <p>

"Uhm, no, Xander, I think we're all set here." Giles began, waving the boy off.

Dropping his voice, Xander sidled up to the librarian, "Giles, PLEASE!"

"Then again, we could always use an extra pair of hands," He amended promptly in an unnaturally loud voice.

Amy and Julian simply looked at each other.

"So, what's the game plan?" Xander asked, an eager smile on his face.

**

Stifling a yawn, Willow stalked into her suite and made her way over to the bed, "You," She snapped her fingers and pointed at
>one of Spike's many lackeys, "Take these and chain the Slayer up."
<p>

Looking up in surprise, the stocky vampire hesitated for only a moment before quickly stepping forward, a hungry gleam in his

>eyes. <p>

Rolling her eyes in boredom, Willow threw the handcuffs at him and lithely drew aside.

Brutally grabbing the slayer's right wrist, he shoved it into one of the silver shackles, snapping the bright circlet around it so

>tightly that the metal cut into flesh of her skin. Treating her left wrist with the same ferocity, he paused at the fresh, heady aroma

of the blood welling up from Buffy's torn wounds.

"Don't even think about it," Willow's coldly calm warning penetrated his hazy intellect just in time and he quickly pounced up
>off of the bed and safely away from the tempting Slayer.
<p>

Receiving an annoyed glare from Willow, the underling quickly bowed his head in deference to her authority and made his way
>out of the room as fast as possible. <p>

"I can see you have your men well trained, Spike." She favored the peroxide vampire with an easy smile.

He drew himself up from his languid pose against her door and carelessly flicked bits of ash from his cigarette, "You done?"

Nodding, she smiled and showed a hint of fang, "Almost."

"Pray tell, Darla," He coolly blew a column of smoke out, "What do you plan on doing with all thisâ€¦company?"

Willow merely shrugged and returned her attention to Buffy.

"She's cute, isn't she, Spike?"

Folding his arms over his chest, the blonde vampire didn't respond.

"A little on the ditzy side, but cute nonetheless," she mused, strolling around the side of the mattress to take a seat next to the
>blonde girl's head, "Don't you think?" <p>

"She's alright," he responded dully, fixing a wary gaze on the redheaded vampiress.

"Well, I mean, she's simply GOT to be more than just 'alright' seeing as how our dearly beloved Angel is so very very fond of
>herâ€¦" She let her voice trail off as a mildly sadistic gleam entered her dark green eyes, "Slayers are especially flexible, aren't

they Spike? Athletic and all that."

"I wouldn't know." He paced slowly past her.

"Not as flexible as a vampire I'd imagine, but still better than a normal human."

Unsure of what to make of her random comments, Spike chose to remain silent.

"What do you think it is, Spike? What do you think makes him love her so much? I mean, it can't be her looks. She has
>absolutely no figure on her. I could have filled out that shirt ten times better in my old body. Besides, if he was looking for

someone with those kinds of assets, why not that deliciously bitchy girl Cordelia? How much fun would it be to turn her,

>Spike?" She looked up at him expectantly and he merely shrugged.
<p>

Frankly, the thought left a mildly bad taste in his mouth but he wasn't about to share his opinion.

Sighing, she went back to stroking Buffy's hair, "I mean, it obviously wasn't the sex. You can't brag about what you can't do."

Unable to help himself, Spike let the comment slip, "Well, he *did* lose his soul, luv."

"Yes, that 'one moment of true happiness' bullshit," she muttered under her breath, "For all we know, he was just happy that
>the skanky bitch was finally giving it up." <p>

Suppressing the urge to snort aloud, Spike merely nodded.

Satisfied with her explanation, Willow leaned back against the mattress, "And it definitely couldn't have been her personality.

>Hel-lo, the girl is about as deep as a puddle and ridiculously slow on the uptake. I'm truly shocked she's still alive at all with the

amount of information that goes right over her head." Her hand paused over the Slayer's hair and she drew her fingers into a

>fist, firmly clutching a handful of the golden locks. <p>

"But such pretty blonde hair." Willow grinned, "Then again, I used to have blonde hair."

"Yes, as I recall, you did."

Glancing up at him, Willow's smile widened. "Just between you and me, I think she dyes it. Or, highlights it at the very least."

"Are we going to kill her or not, Darla?" Spike asked finally, an edge of impatience in his voice.

"God, Spike, you really don't have an ounce of creative flair at all do you?"

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"Well, I'm personally interested in seeing whether or not Buffy dyes her hair."

He rolled his eyes, "Why?"

"Because," She pinned him with a deadly glare, "it's fun. And nothing is worth doing unless it's fun. So, are you in?"

Her fingers flitted lightly over the zipper on Buffy's tight black pants, causing Spike's eyes to widen.

"Or do you want to leave and let me play the game on my own?" She pouted slightly and glanced up at Spike whose eyes were
>still glued to where her fingers rested lightly on the Slayer's stomach. <p>

Before he could respond, the slayer moaned softly and shifted in her sleep.

Bending forward, Willow's red hair grazing Buffy's pale throat as she pressed a light kiss to the other girl's lips. Sighing, she

>stood. "Sorry Spikey, impulse gone. I'm exhausted. Tomorrow night then?" <p>

Spike's blue eyes darkened, "Still a tease, eh, Darla?"

"It's a new body." She shrugged. I'm jet lagged."

"Of course."

**

Cuddling sleepily against his fluffy white pillow, Xander sank into a contented state of semi-exhaustion.

"Are you sure you're okay?"

>She leaned over the edge of her bed, and looked down at him. <p>

He opened a sleepy eye and regarded the somewhat confused looking witch clad in a modest green t-shirt with white boxers.

"'Okay' sleeping on the floor, I mean. Not like 'okay' mentally or anything since I already know the answer to that questionâ€|"

>Despite her own exhaustion and injuries she shot him a playful smile. <p>

"Yes, I'm fine on the floor thank you very much." He responded, choosing to ignore her jibe. "I'm just sorry that Giles' room >was so crowded that you got stuck with me." <p>

Sighing, Amy couldn't help but feel a pang of guilt, "C'mon, Xander, you know I was just kidding. I'm just kind of wigged by >this is allâ€|you seriously won't tell me what's going on?" <p>

"Night, Amy."

Rolling her eyes, she threw herself back against her own pillow and sighed.

Suddenly, a thought occurred to the figure huddled on the ground and he coughed nervously, "Uhm, yo Amy?"

"YES, Xander?" She responded wearily.

"Your door IS locked, right?"

She paused before responding, "Yes, it is, but I'd like to warn you right now that if this is some sort of weird little plan of yours,

>I'm not quite as zapped out as I look. Need be, I can still turn you into insta-rat." <p>

Biting off a more scathing response, Xander merely pulled the blanket more firmly around his shoulders, "Don't flatter yourself."

Blushing slightly, the witch turned on her side, careful not to disturb her injured hand.

"Freak." She muttered under her breath.

"Get some sleep, Madison." He rumbled softly in response.

She grinned, "'Night, Harris."

"Night, Amy"

"Night, Xander."

Letting out a scream strongly reminiscent to that of a girl, Xander leaped off of the floor and into Amy's bed.

Pulling herself back into a seated position, the witch shot him a

bemused smile, "Okay, although you gotta work on subtlety, I
>give you points for atheletic form." <p>

"Tell that to her!" Xander whispered harshly, clutching her arm and
nodding in the direction of the door.

"Teri? What're you doing here?" The brunette smiled at the younger
girl warmly.

"I was having some nightmares. Couldn't sleep, can I sleep in here
with you and Xander?" She batted her dark blue eyes
>hopefully. <p>

As the grip on Amy's arm tightened astronomically, the witch had to
grit her teeth to prevent from wincing in pain, "I'm not sure

>that's such a good idea, Teri. Xander and I will probably be getting
up in a little while anyway and we'll have to use this room
to
prep for tomorrow night. It's better for you to get uninterrupted
sleep, so why don't you go to Cordelia's room? I think that

>Heather and Eliz are in there already." Wrenching her appendage away
from her dark haired companion, Amy calmly jumped
off of her bed
and showed the disappointed teenager to the door.

"Goodnight, Teri," gently, she pushed the slayer-in-training into the
hallway before leaning down, "You might want to go a little

>easier on the seduction. Men tend to get overwhelmed easily," she
whispered conspiratorially, "Especially Xander." <p>

"You don't think he's too old for me?" Teri asked.

Snorting softly, Amy shook her head, "I have a hard time believing
that Xander's too old for anyone but then, that's really your

>decision to make. Besides, he's not even that cute." <p>

Teri quirked an eyebrow.

Suppressing a smile, the witch glared down in mock anger, "Okay,
maybe he's just a little cute but you didn't hear it from me.
>Now go to bed." <p>

Giggling, the blond girl nodded and scampered down the hall.

Firmly closing and locking her door, Amy turned and headed back to
the bed.

"Xander, she's 12. You've got to be kidding me."

"Can I sleep up here with you?"

"You're joking, right?"

"She could kick my ass, easy!" He burrowed lower beneath her blanket.

"So can I, Xander." Rolling her eyes, she swatted at him, "Now move
over, you loser, and give me some room."

Shuffling gratefully to the side, he cleared a space for her.

Waiting for the dark haired girl to settle in, he smiled, "Hey, Amy, have I ever mention that I love you?"

"Shut up, Xander."

"Consider it done."

**

> <p>

It had been nearly 40 minutes since she'd last heard anyone enter or leave.

Cautiously, Buffy opened her eyes and peered into the inky darkness of Darla's bedroom. Even with her slayer enhanced sight, >she was still having trouble adjusting to the lack of light in the room. Moaning loudly, she paused and checked for movement.
<p>

Sensing nothing, she moaned a bit louder.

Still silence.

Satisfied, she subtly started testing the strength of the metal cuffs that bound her wrists.

Solid as ever and seemingly unbreakable.

Sighing, the slayer relaxed her arms in resignation. She'd just have to figure out another way to get free. Tapping her fingers

>absent-mindedly against the links around her wrists, she paused.
<p>

Unlessâ€¦|

But it couldn't beâ€¦|

Biting her lip, she tried to get a better look at her binds but to no avail.

>They were locked well behind and on the post of the bed, under the level of her head. Even in light, they would have been out
of her line of vision. Shrugging, she decided to take her chances.

Gritting her teeth, Buffy clenched her fists and yanked down as hard as she could.

With a satisfying click, the chains broke cleanly in half, releasing her hands from their awkward position.

The Slayer was free.

> <p>

Angel's dark eyes flitted from the chains around his wrists to the narrow piece of metal he'd found lying on the floor a few feet

>away. <p>

Once his eyes had adjusted to the minimal light, it hadn't been too difficult to spot the small sliver which could mean his
>freedom. <p>

The difficult part would be reaching it.

Spike wasn't stupid. He'd seen to it that both Angel's wrists and ankles were firmly shackled, giving him barely enough room
>to stretch his head to look up let alone attempt to move anywhere in his small chamber. <p>

However, after quite a few hours of feigning unconsciousness while testing his bonds, Angel was fairly certain that the chain

>anchoring his left wrist to the wall creaked just a bit more than the rest of his binds. If there was indeed a flaw in construction or

a weak link, the vampire could conceivably wear it down more.

Given time.

The sharp click of a bolt being unlocked signaled a visitor and he paused in his thoughts to prepare himself for the worst.

"Well you're looking better."

A smirk planted firmly on her face, Willow stepped into the chamber.

>For Angel, Willow's voice had always been somewhat comforting. Even though in the past the hacker tended to panic more
often than not, to hear her gentle babbling always made their bad situations seem a bit more bearable. If Willow still had the
>presence of mind to speak, well, things couldn't be quite so bad. Now, however, her voice had more of the effect of nails on a

chalkboard. A shiver ran up the vampire's spine and he lowered his gaze again.

"Then again, I always liked you in chains."

She closed the door behind her, plunging the room back into darkness before slowly making her way towards the vampire.

"Come now, Angel. You're not whipped already, are you?" Her whisper sent a gentle stream of cold air into his ear and he
>wordlessly turned his head away. <p>

"Seems like all brood and no play has made my Angelus a quiet boy." Her hands moved to his tattered shirt, "Let's see if we
>can change that." With a quick jerk of her wrists, Willow tore the soiled material off of his body and threw it aside. <p>

At the sensation of her hands on his bare chest, he froze, causing the muscles to stand rigid and hard under her fingertips.

"Don't worry, sweetheart, I'm not going to force you. I never had to before, and I don't think I'm going to have to this time."

Fixing his gaze firmly to the back wall, Angel refused to react outwardly. Internally his mind was awl trying to figure out

>exactly what this new torture tactic was supposed to accomplish. The scene itself was definitely bizarre enough to be
emotionally scarring. Angel's unwilling seduction by Darla after hours of being beaten by Spike was pushing his tolerance for
>abuse to the limits. But add to it the fact that Darla now wore Willow's body and the vampire was grappling simply to retain his

sense of reality.

And now, as Willow was slowly kissing her way from his jaw line to his collarbone, he was also trying to pretend he was
>somewhere else entirely. <p>

"Say the word Angel, and I'll let you out of here." She trailed her hands down his back while nipping lightly at his shoulder.

>"Promise to stay this time and I'll end the pain. I swear."
<p>

Still receiving no response, she abruptly stopped and backed away from him.

The next sound he heard was the slap of skin on skin as Willow's fist connected firmly with Angel's abdomen. The vampire
>bent forward with a grunt but could only move part way due to his restraints. He closed his eyes against the throbbing pain, but

tried to zero in on it. Anything was better than concentrating on Darla.

Stepping forward swiftly, Willow leaned as close to Angel as possible, this time pressing her body firmly against his own and

>putting her hands on his head to draw it nearer. <p>

"Angel, don't worry, it's me. It's Willow." Her lips were so close to his ear that they brushed it repeatedly as she spoke, "I'm
>sorry for hitting you but we don't have a lot of time."
<p>

Furrowing his brow slightly, the vampire merely grunted in response.

"I'm only pretending to be Darla to get you out of here. Spike has men outside the door who are listening in on this, so please,

>just play along. If you pretend to submit, I can get you out faster." <p>

Her words were spoken in such quick, hushed tones that a small part of the vampire almost believed in their sincerity. Opening
>his eyes slowly, he scrutinized her. <p>

To his surprise, he did indeed see his former friend reflected in her dark green orbs.

"Okay?" She whispered eagerly while nibbling on his earlobe.

A growl to the affirmative was all the indication he gave her that he understood.

Pulling back, she resumed speaking in a normal voice, "You know what I find most interesting about this, though, lover? I think
>you actually might have had a thing for this skinny red haired loser way back when." <p>

Hearing those words coming out of her mouth and knowing that it was all an act, Angel couldn't believe that Willow wasn't
>blushing. <p>

"W-weâ€|we were friends." He responded, narrowing his eyes at the vampiress.

"Yes," she trailed her nails lightly down his chest, "so it seems that you were. But tell me, Angel, while you were out with that

>blonde bimbo slayer of yours, you can't honestly expect me to believe that there wasn't some part of you, no matter how small,

that wasn't lusting after forbidden fruit." She paused to look down at herself while lightly running her fingers up and down her

>torso, "Especially when the fruit isn't half bad." <p>

He remained silent.

"I mean, come on!" She chuckled, "Sure the blonde had the body, but when it comes to women, I know your real weakness
>has always been brains. If there was one thing I could always count on when it came to you and other women was the more
clever the girl, the more dangerous she was. That's why I let Dru hang around for so long without staking her. Now, seeing as
>how Buffy is about equal to string cheese on the evolutionary scale, I find it very hard to believe that you weren't bored. I
mean, in between your lengthy make-out sessions, you know, when you actually had to sit and listen to her drone on and on
>about clothes and hair and makeup, there had to have been times when you were wishing for a little more." <p>

When he didn't respond again, she gripped his face in her hand, forcing him to make eye contact, "Don't lie to mommy. I
>always know when you lie, Angel." <p>

The shock of suddenly seeing Darla again, in such a convincing form no less, made Angel's relief over being rescued falter.
>Almost accidentally, the words poured past his lips. <p>

"Maybe once."

Triumphantly, Willow smiled and released him. "Let me guess, that time you saw the Doppelganger? All that leather get you
>excited for old times?" <p>

"Noâ€|" Angel slowly shook his head, "It was the time I went to her for help. The first night she invited me into her room. She
>was nervous butâ€|.kind. She helped me without even really knowing

who I was. She trusted me. She helped a lot and was
really talented with her computer. Granted, she kept talking and talking but it wasâ€¦sweet." The desire to be somewhere else >had become so great that he was allowing himself to be lost in the memory. <p>

"After which you repaid her sweetness and trust by stalking her and trying to murder her. How romantic."

Startled out of his reverie, he flinched at the coldness of her voice.

"Do you want redemption, Angel?"

"Dar-,"

Shaking her head, she placed a hand over his mouth, cutting off the rest of his sentence.

In a softer voice, she asked the question again, "Do you want redemption?"

Not quite comprehending, he looked deeply into her eyes until realization struck. Slowly, Angel mouthed her name.

'Willow'

Smiling, she nodded her head and he slowly nodded his in turn.

"Never forget that I am your only redemption."

"You are my only redemption." He repeated slowly after her.

"And I will save you."

"You will save m-,"

Suddenly, she leaned forward and kissed him.

Despite his wariness and fear, exhaustion overcame the vampire and he could do little to resist the advance.

Breaking away for a second, Willow murmured just loud enough for him to hear.

"I loved you enough to get you out of hell once. I know I can do it again."

And with that, she resumed the kiss, this time pouring all of her desperation, fear and desire into it. She clung to him, as though

>to a lifeline, her nails digging deeply into his back as she anchored herself firmly against his body. <p>

The effect her words had on Angel was just as dramatic. His posture, which had been stooped in defeat for so long, shot >straight up to better support her weight. For the first time in almost two days, Angel was standing on his own two feet. <p>

It was almost as if they had forged an emotional bond through their physical connection and through it, Angel could read Willow's emotions. The untainted love in her heart burned so strongly it seared his very soul. <p>

She grasped and clawed hungrily at his neck and face as he returned her kiss just as enthusiastically, straining fully against his

>binds. <p>

He wasn't quite sure exactly when it happened, but at some point during the kiss, Willow slipped into game face. Just as the heat between them burned to near feverish levels, she bit down hard into his lower lip, drawing blood. <p>

The action shot like electricity through his body and with one swift motion, he yanked his wrist away from the wall, breaking the

>slightly rusted chain. With one hand free, he brought it to tangle roughly in her hair, savoring the feel of the silken copper strands

between his fingertips.

At the sensation of his hand on the back of her head, she pulled away.

"Willow" her name was torn from his lips in a harsh whisper as his desire drugged gaze followed her movements.

"Oh Angel" She gently backed away from him, "I'm so sorry"

Within seconds he felt hands emerge from the darkness and resecure his chains.

"but Willow's dead."

> <p>

Part 16 (co-written by JR jrr42@yahoo.com)

**

>Willow stretched as she sauntered down the hall, purposefully ignoring the attention she was silently receiving from Spike's men

as they passed by her, on their way to complete various different tasks.

It was nearly dawn and she had been up for the past several hours, carefully devising a plan for the next few days and
>essentially taking over as mistress of her grandchild's motley group of vampires. Although Spike stayed relatively out of her

way, she knew very well he was far from being submissive. He was clever and sneaky by nature and up to something. She'd
>just have to wait to find out exactly what that was. In the eyes of his men, however, she reigned supreme. <p>

It hadn't escaped their notice when their sire, sporting some vicious injuries, was half dragged into his own lair by an unknown
>female vampire. The very mystery and strangeness of the situation was what made them wary of her. There was no telling what

she could do and since Spike was putting on an obedient front, they all followed suit.

For the time being at least.

If there was anything she could count on, it was the fact that in addition to being cocky and sometimes careless, Spike was also

>unruly and unpredictable. <p>

She'd just have to make sure not to wake up with a stake to her chest.

Sighing dramatically, she pushed open the door to her chamber and entered.

It wasn't until after she'd sat on her bed and was dutifully kicking off her heels that she noticed it. Her posture snapped to

>attention and she closed her eyes. <p>

Without turning around, she let out a quiet moan.

"You've GOT to be shitting me."

Buffy was gone.

**

>

"Get dressed!"

Amy nearly fell out of bed when Giles came storming into the room.

"What's going on?" The witch asked blearily, shooting a glance at her watch.

It was past 8 in the morning. They'd overslept.

"Dammit!" She groaned, half throwing herself and half tumbling over the side of the bed. She reached forward to snatch clothes
>out of her overnight duffle bag. <p>

"I need your help." The librarian responded simply. "We have a lot to prepare for tonight."

"Oh Godâ€|" Xander merely flopped back down, the adrenaline rush from Giles' entrance was wearing off and he felt sleep
>overtake him, "I thought someone was dead or somethingâ€|" <p>

The librarian removed his glasses to rub the bridge of his nose, "Not likely."

"Get up, Xander."

"But Buffy, we went to bed, at like, 5 or 6 in the morning, yester-," He paused in mid-whine and sat up again. "Buffy?"

"In the flesh." The slayer grinned at him, holding up her white bandaged wrists, "Or what's left of it."

Leaping out of bed, he stumbled through the sheets entangled between his legs and engulfed her in a huge hug.

"What's going on?" Robin and Carrie poked their heads into the room, half awake.

"Buffy!" slow, sleepy smiles spread over their faces and they attached themselves to the Slayer as well. "We knew you'd come

>back." <p>

"Where's Willow?" Amy asked, looking over the other girl's shoulder.

"In a lot of trouble." Buffy responded softly. "And we don't have a lot of time. We need to move tonight."

"What do you mean Willow's in trouble?" Laura poked her head into the room, a scowl already planted firmly on her face.

"Why don't the three of you go wake the others?" Giles glanced at the girls, "We're going to need everyone's help to get ready."

His words hit home and the three teenagers scampered off obediently.

Amy, now fully dressed, took a moment to fully regard the slayer.

"Buffy, what happened? Why were you gone for so long and
>why isn't Willow back with you?" <p>

Xander's sleep-addled brain also caught up with the situation just as he got one leg into his khakis. Pausing, he nearly fell over

>before hopping back and falling into a seated position on the bed.
<p>

"Is she hurt? Did Spike kidnap her? Where the hell is she?"

"I couldn't bring her with me." Buffy sighed, "Why don't you guys finish getting ready and then meet me in the kitchen? We
>really need to talk."

**

> <p>

The minion let out a short howl of surprise as he felt the stake enter his heart. Seconds later, he vanished.

"Bloody incompetent bastards. How fucking many of you are there? I didn't nearly get indigestion turning you pathetic lot to
>have you stand around and stare at me." <p>

Spinning around, Spike grabbed another underling, "Pillocks!! All of you are bloody pillocks!" Frustrated, he shoved the
>quaking vampire aside. <p>

"Nice to know that you have everything under control, Spike." Willow smirked at him from her position reclined on a sofa
>across the room. <p>

His jaw muscles clenched visibly as he turned to look at her, "I wouldn't start just now, Darla."

Her eyes glittered dangerously, "If I was starting something with you, Spike, you wouldn't have time to warn me not to."

Cocking his head to one side, he narrowed his gaze, "Don't get smart with me. I've had about enough of you."

"Oh come on, it's barely even been a day." She rolled her eyes dramatically before shooting him a playful smile, "Whatever's

>happened to that magnificent stamina of yours?" <p>

There was a pause as everyone crowded in the room looked to their sire for a response.

"Out," He howled, pushing several of his men towards the door, "Get out and find the slayer. All of you! Get out now!"

"But sire, it's dawn already, how ar-," The vampire's question was cut off with the rather abrupt appearance of a stake in his

>chest. <p>

In seconds, the chamber cleared.

Stalking silently over to the door, Spike slammed it shut before pacing back to his position in front of the long mahogany table

>stretched out across the back wall of the room. It was several moments before he spoke again and when he did, his back was
to her, his words strained and clipped.

"Never question my authority in front of my men, Darla. Angel didn't put up with it and neither will I."

"Oh, Spike," the red-head spoke with disappointment in >her voice, "that's very vanilla of you. Don't tell
me that those few months you spent fighting with the >kinder, gentler version of your Angel have left
you...soft," Willow glanced at the blond vampire's >crotch to reenforce her double entendre. "Maybe Spike
isn't the right nickname for you anymore. Maybe we >shoud try something more apropos -- like '3-penny
nail' or 'screw' -- oh wait, that won't work anymore, >either. How silly of me, pouring salt into fresh
wounds like that."

"How about 'stud'? Does that work better for you," >Spike bit out. <p>

"Well...well...well," Willow commented, accentuating >her lofty tone with one elegantly raised eyebrow.
"Welcome back, junior. I was wondering when the >Spike I know and love...to torment...would put in an
appearance."

"The real me has always been here, which..." the blond >vampire's baby blue eyes roved down the slender body
before him,

"...is more than I can say for a few
>others around here." <p>

The close examination of her scantily dressed form was
>duly noted by Willow. With only a passing nod to
subtlety, the
red-head shifted. The adjustment forced
>her weight to one leg, which in turn thrust her hip
forward like
a supermodel on a fashion runway. It
>was, in fact, an open invitation for a closer
examination of her
body.

And one which Spike did not turn down.

"So, what do you think?" Willow asked.

"Not bad," Spike answered honestly.

"A little bit skinnier compared to what I'm used to,"
>she pouted. <p>

"Well," Spike waved a dismissive hand. "You know how
>these humans are today. All those stupid fad diets.
I mean look
at this body," he nodded in Willow's
>direction, "I tell you, it's thinner than a bloody
Chinese
waiter.

"And you know what they say about eating Chinese..."
>Willow began the old saying <p>

"...an hour later, you're hungry again!" Willow and
>Spike chorused together. <p>

"Spike, Spike, Spike," the red-head chanted. "You've
>always been a rotten grand-child, but there have been
a few
nanoseconds where I have missed you. But, then
>again, I was going through some pretty heavy immortal
damnation,
so, I may have just been out of my mind."

"Hmmm," Spike commented, taking a small step forward
>to press his larger body tightly against Willow's
back. "You
know, I can remember a time or two when I
>*did* drive you out of your mind." <p>

She grinned, "Well, I see at least the ego is still intact."

He spun her around suddenly, capturing her wrist in his cold
vice-like grip, "There's a lot more than just that, Darla."

She gasped in surprise as his other hand snaked around to rest at the
base of her back and he jerked her forward, pressing
>their bodies tightly together. <p>

A slow smile blossomed on her face, "You never were big on foreplay
were you, Spike?"

The feral glint in his blue eyes deepend, "As I recall, neither were
you."

His face changed and he kissed her roughly, his fangs gently clicking
against her own as their tongues mated almost violently.

>Pulling away from her just as abruptly, he merely smiled and hefted her up so she was seated on the table. <p>

Leaning forward, she blew softly into his ear. "Tell me, Spike, exactly how much do you recall?"

She brought her legs up around his waist, intimately joining them while her hands rose up to stroke the ridges near his temple.

"More than you'd think, pet."

His cold mouth descended to her neck and she moaned at the sensation, arching her back slightly. His tongue swept across her
>clavicle and up towards the base of her jaw with almost human
tenderness. His
lips sensuously skimming across the soft, velvety
skin
>of Willow's neck. In a gesture of acquiescence, she
eased her
head to one side, exposing her throat for
>Spike's attention. Smiling at his success, he slowly
but surely
brought his hands up, using his fingertips
>to trace down her arms. Shifting into his 'game
face', the
vampire used his sharp incisors to nibble
>down Willow's throat, taking care not to break the
skin...yet.

"Tell me something else, Spikeâ€|" She whispered.

He nipped gently at her exposed flesh without responding.

"â€|do you ever recall my fucking you when Angel was around ?"

He paused in his ministrations to look up at her.

She stared back at him emotionlessly.

His eyes darkened but he didn't release his grip on her neck.

"As a matter of fact, luv, no."

"So what exactly makes you think I'm going to start now?"

Unperturbed by her challenge, he shrugged, "Simple, pet. Your golden son's been dead for nearly a century. Angel's a gutted,

>simpering, pathetic nancy boy, now. And that's before I even laid a
finger on him." <p>

"And I take it that Dru's gone?"

"Yep." The pain that flickered over his features over the mention of her name belied the casual tone of his voice. "Which leaves
>just youâ€|and me." He leaned forward, his lips hovering a few
tantalizing inches from her own. "So what do you say, luv?"
<p>

Willow regarded him through half-lidded eyes. "I say that you should pick your allies very carefully, Spike."

"Really? And why is that, Darla?"

"Because, Spikeâ€|"

His mouth brushed against hers gently.

"Your jacket is on fire."

Her words took a full second to sink in and once they did, he jerked away from her as though stung.

"I never was one to settle for second best, Spike." With a flick of her wrist she procured the small book of matches from some
>hidden compartment in her shirt and flung it at the startled vampire. "Never forget that." <p>

Glancing behind, he noted the growing flames clinging to the back of his long duster and quickly began shrugging off the
>offensive garment. <p>

Scooting off the table, she jumped to the floor. "I'm going to go to bed."

Grunting in frustration, he stomped on his still-smoldering jacket as she calmly turned and walked out of the room.

As if thinking better she paused at the door, "Oh, and Spikeâ€|"

His head snapped up yellow eyes glowing angrily.

"Don't even think about waking me up."

**

"You want to blow up the cave." Xander stared at her in disbelief, "Okay, I'm sorry but how exactly is that a plan?"

"Not just blow the whole thing up, I think we can specifically take out certain exits leaving only the ones we want open. Instead
>of going in and trying to maneuver through the tunnels in the dark, we can flush them out." <p>

"How can we be sure that we don't kill or trap Willow and Angel?" Whistler spoke up for the first time in several hours. Ever
>since Buffy had returned without his charges, he'd become silent and sullen. Now however, he appeared to be considering the
slayer's plan.

"Well, I was kind of hopingâ€|" Buffy darted a look at Amy and the witch sighed.

"Magic?" Julian supplied.

"Yeah."

"Uhm, hel-lo, but didn't we already try using magic less than a day ago and look how that ended up!" Xander stared at the
>group, slightly wild eyed and shocked. <p>

Placing a comforting hand on the boy's shoulder, Giles sighed, "We

may not have any other options."

Pressing her head against the firm coolness of the kitchen table, Amy covered her ears with her hands, "I just can't deal with this

>anymore." She whimpered miserably, "I want them back." <p>

"So do I, kid. So do I," Whistler said softly, "All I can tell you, though, is that I can still feel her. She's okay."

"But she's hurting," Julian added. "A lot."

A few of the Slayers in Training sniffled softly from their position at the entrance to the kitchen. The girls were lacking the

>confidence and luster they had gained over the past few weeks and as a result, the group as a whole looked haggard and worn
out. Being young and inexperienced they sorely needed leadership and encouragement. With Willow missing and Buffy and the >others too caught up in the whole mess to spare time on them, they felt inadequate, unneeded and generally helpless. <p>

Taking in this depressing scene, Cordelia felt something inside her surge forward.

"Okay people, let's do this."

It took a few seconds, but she waited until she had everyone's attention.

"The longer we sit here and mope, the less time we have to-to do something." Furrowing her brow, the dark haired girl put on >her best determined smile, "We've been in worse places than this before. I mean, does anyone else remember graduation day?
Big icky mayor snake? Hey, I still have nightmares!" Her smile faded somewhat at the memory, "Uhmâ€|anyways, what I'm >trying to say is look at us! We have a witch, a slayer, a vampire, a demon, tons of little slayer wannabes not to mention as many
stuffy librarians as we want!"

Xander raised his hand.

"Oh! And we have Xander too, which isâ€|uhmâ€|.good because he can go out and get us food!" With growing enthusiasm, she >slammed her fist down on the table, "Bottom line is that we kick ass! We're smart, we're strong and man are we good at
blowing things up! I mean, we've done it before, haven't we?!"

Thoughtfully, Giles nodded, "That's true."

"Exactly! And what do they have? Vampiresâ€|.lots and lots of vampiresâ€|.but who cares? Buffy knows vampires! She kills >them all the time!" <p>

The slayer shrugged, "Girl's got a point."

"And hey, Buffy's little fan club knows vampires! They've been training for years. And let's not forget that vampires might be

>strong and look all badass but fundamentally they're stupid," Cordelia paused, "Present company excluded." <p>

"Of course." Julian nodded graciously.

"What I'm trying to say is even though you all might be inadequate losers individually, together, you're great!"

"I was so with you up until that part." Xander sighed.

"We need to stop acting so pathetic, quit complaining, get up, and get this show on the road."

A wild cheer went up from the slayers in training as they took off from the kitchen.

"Where are they going?" Giles asked.

"Not a clue," Amy shrugged, standing up, "Infectious enthusiasm does weird things. Okay, I have a few spells in mind but it's >going to take some time." <p>

"I'll help." Julian nodded at the witch and the two quickly exited the kitchen.

"I should probably call the Council. They'll most likely want to stay informed if we plan on detonating high quantities of >explosives near the Immortal Watcher." Rubbing his glasses vigorously, the librarian headed for the living room. <p>

"Doughnuts anyone? I can do doughnuts! Giles, do you have the rat-mobile?" Xander scampered off after him.

"Way to go Cordelia." Whistler limped over to where the tall brunette was standing and put a friendly arm around her waist.

"Watch the skirt and yes, thank you, I know how great I am."

"Not to mention a big rah rah to Sunnydale High. Who would have thought that all those years of cheerleading would have come >in handy?" <p>

"You know that I'm fully capable of hurting you, don't you?" She smiled at him sweetly.

"Already so violent and I didn't even get to my pom pom joke. You wouldn't really hit a poor man who was already in a >weakened physical state, would you?" <p>

She made a face but allowed him to lean on her for support as they too left the kitchen, "Do you really want me to answer that

>question?" <p>

He smirked at her, "Probably not."

**

When she awoke hours later, it was to the screams.

The commotion in the hall was reaching an almost deafening level as vampires ran in every which way, trying to avoid heavy
>piles of stone and mortar which rapidly fell from the ceiling.
<p>

Vaguely, Willow thought she heard Spike shouting her name, but she couldn't be sure. Not waiting to find out, she grabbed her

>necklace, slipped it over her head, and headed out into the din, dodging the occasional hysterical fledgling running in the

opposite direction. She forced her way against the current of fleeing vampires, down to the torture chamber.

And to Angel.

She almost made it to her destination when an iron clad grip encircled her upper arm, abruptly jolting her to a stop, "Mistress

>Darla, the cavern is collapsing! Where are you going? There's an alternate opening this way!" <p>

She paused to look at one of Spike's older men who was, no doubt, worried less for her safety and more for his own hide if
>she were to die. <p>

The floor lurched again, causing him to lose hold of her arm.

"I'm going to get what's mine. Out of my way." Pushing past him, she rounded the corner into the chamber and slammed face
>first into a solid wall of flesh. <p>

"Angel?!"

He stood over her and paused for a moment, his eyes slightly unfocused as if he wasn't quite comprehending who she was or
>the source of the ruckus surrounding them. His chains, broken but still hanging from the iron circlets around his bruised wrists,

swung gently in place.

She glanced down at his arms before looking back into his eyes, "I came to get you, Sp-,"

"Bitch." He snarled suddenly, backhanding her across the hall and into the wall.

The metal links caught her neck, causing blood to run freely down her throat.

"Angel.."

"You kil-killed her." Hours of torture, both emotional and physical, had clouded his ability to reason. All that was left was pain,

>hurt and complete and utter fury. One thing was certain in his mind, though. Darla had tricked him. Willow truly was dead. <p>

He stared at her as she tried to scramble up off of the floor, narrowly missing being pinned by a falling rock.

Limping forwards, her game face firmly in place, she shook her head

>and growled. <p>

"Willow!" He howled in misery.

"Stop!" She screamed back as he geared up for another shot at her.

>As if to accentuate her words, she made a shoving motion with her hands. The force of the magic that hit him seconds later sent
him flying backwards down the hallway.

A heavy cloud of dust blew from behind her signaling that a major chunk of the cave had collapsed and time was running out.

As his head hit a piece of rock jutting from the rear exit of the cave, he thought he heard her scream again.

"Angelâ€|RUN!!"

Drifting towards unconsciousness, he could do little more than moan as strong hands suddenly reached under his arms and >hefted him outside into the cold night air. <p>

"Angel? It's okay, it's Buffy. I'm getting you out of here."

His vision rapidly fading, he tried to get a look at the blonde slayer hovering over him.

"..Willowâ€|" he whispered softly.

"Willow? Angel, where is she?" The Slayer glanced up past him, "Did you see her? Did she get out?"

"She'sâ€|."

Just then the entrance to the cave fully collapsed with a rather impressive deep rumble which shook the ground under his body.

"Willow?!" Buffy screamed, quickly dropping Angel to the ground and running >back, "Willow!! NO!!" <p>

Unable to help it any more, he succumbed to an exhausted sleep, plagued with horrible, vicious images and painful memories of >the past few days. <p>

In his minds eye he was haunted by his last few moments with the demon that wore Willow's body.

The terrified look in her dark green eyes outlined by the viscious ridges of her face.

The sharp gleam of her fangs.

The trickle of blood that ran down her slender throat after he hit her.

But perhaps worst of all was the one thing he hadn't seen-at least not until it was much too late.

For, as she had geared back to hit him with her wave of magic, the top button of her shirt had come undone and he had caught
>a quick glimpse down her blouse. <p>

It was right about then that he saw the cross around her neck.

It shone brightly against the untouched paleness of her skin.
> <p>

Part 17
> <p>

Amy sighed and rolled her head forwards.

"It wasn't your fault. You can't blame yourself." Julian gently worked into her shoulders and back, trying to relieve the

>seemingly boundless tension the young witch was suffering from.
<p>

"I should have known better." She responded quietly, "I gave Willow so much flack about holding her concentrationâ€¦I should
>have known better. I acted like a novice out there." <p>

"If anyone is to blame, it's me. Not you." The blonde vampire paused in mid-massage, "If I hadn't-,"

"Don't EVEN say that. Unlike me, you couldn't control your reaction."

Amy's thoughts returned with a vengeance to the events of a few short hours ago and she let out a soft whimper.

Whistler, Julian and she had been in perfect synch and the spell was working beautifully. Each was concentrating on their own
>part and a delicate yet powerful balance had been achieved. Yes, things had been going exactly according to plan up until the

unexpected cave-in close to the rear exit.

With a shout, Julian had fallen backwards and out of their circle causing Amy and Whistler to be hit full-force with magical

>backlash. <p>

Caught entirely off-guard, the situation went from bad to worse and the other two were unable to hold the spell, causing a
>complete collapse of the cave's structure which effectively trapped Willow inside. <p>

"Amyâ€¦Julianâ€¦Angel's awake." Robin whispered the words from the doorway, her gaze downcast, "He's asking for you
>guys." <p>

Her heart leaping to her throat, Amy's dark blue eyes briefly met her counterpart's paler ones before they both made their way
>into Cordelia's bedroom. <p>

"Amy." Angel's tired gaze regarded her carefully the instant she walked in, "I need answers."

She took a deep breath, "Angel, I think you should restâ€¦"

"Evidently, I've been resting for the past 2 months." He tried to keep the edge of bitterness out of his voice but it was getting

>harder. With years of practice and experience he managed to force his own feelings of betrayal aside so as to focus on the task
at hand. What was important right now was saving Willow. As long as he kept that goal firmly in sight, he could concentrate on >not getting violent. "I need to know the truth. I need to know if she's dead or alive or some strange hybrid or what. Tomorrow
I'm going to go and visit the oracles and I need all the facts."

"The oracles?" The brunette looked confused.

"A direct connection to The Powers That Be. Sometimes they'll intervene if the case is important enough." Julian slowly >emerged from behind Amy and deliberately brought himself into the dark haired vampire's line of vision. <p>

"Whatâ€¦" The question died in the Angel's throat and his eyes became almost black with rage, "Youâ€¦I thought you >wereâ€¦.you killed her didn't you? This is all your fault!" Within seconds, Angel was lunging out of bed, "I'll kill you!" <p>

Completely shocked, Amy had little time to do anything but watch the scene play itself out.

Luckily, Whistler entered the room with Buffy in time to stop the enraged vampire from further injuring himself.

"Down boy, down." Placing a halting hand on Angel's chest, Whistler shot him a warning look. The demon's small size belied >his strength and Angel soon found himself being firmly pushed back towards Cordelia's bed. <p>

"Whistler, do you have any idea who that is?" His question came through clenched teeth, "Julian was Darla's-,"

"Consort," Whistler finished, motioning for Buffy to come and help him put the vampire back under the covers. "Yes, I know. >And you would have found out that I knew that if you'd given us a chance to explain before pulling an Angelus." <p>

The insult had it's intended effect and Angel lapsed into a shocked silence long enough for Buffy and Whistler to finish their >task. <p>

Much like a sage master addressing his young, inexperienced charge, Whistler started talking. "Okay, so where was I?" Sitting >down on the bed beside the injured vampire, he looked thoughtful, "So yeah, we're on Julian. Maybe you'd be better off
hearing the explanation from the man himself." Gesturing at the other vampire, he nodded his head.

"Hello, Angel." The blonde man's polite and calm salutation seemed to ignore the fact that the object of his greeting had

>threatened his life mere minutes before. "Even though we never really knew each other, I'm sure that Darla spoke about me to
the point that you have a pretty good idea of the person I was." The comment was made without a hint of pride or smugness, >merely a statement of a fact. <p>

Still eyeing the other man warily, Angel rewarded him with a curt nod.

"However, she probably eliminated the part about how I was, in fact, only acting as her consort to gain information for the >Council Of Elders." <p>

At the revelation of this piece of information, Angel's eyes flew up to Whistler for affirmation.

To his credit, the demon kept his features completely neutral.

Pausing to glance at Whistler as well, Julian continued, "I figure she did that because she didn't have a clue of my real

>intentions. I'm guessing that she was starting to get some indication of my lack of loyalty, be it from familiarity or some vague
intuition a few decades later and that's probably part of the reason why she turned you."

Angel snorted, "So you're trying to tell me that you were really playing for the other team all those years you were with her?"

"Hard to believe, huh?" He shrugged casually, "I had a lot to atone for on terms of my own past. I think being with her was a >way of assuaging my own guilt." A sour look crossed his handsome features, "God, that woman was SUCH a bitchâ€|" <p>

Coughing slightly, Whistler chose that moment to break in, "So basically, that's the extent of Julian's involvement. He's been a

>member of the C.O.E. since well before you were born, Angel, and he spent most of his earlier time with us gathering
intelligence on Darla. His term obviously ended when she chose another consort, namely you, and Julian risked getting killed if >he stayed any longer. Since then, he's mainly been working with younger C.O.E members as a trainer and going on short
reconnaissance missions. So, when this whole thing with Spike went down, I felt he was the best person to call in."

"You used him to link Willow to Darla?" Angel asked incredulously.

"No, nothing like that." Amy shook her head, "There was never any direct link between them."

"*I* was linked directly to Willow." Julian responded. "Throughout her time with Spike, I've been privy to her thoughts and

>emotions. I've been actively feeding her information on how Darla would react in certain situations and helping her to play
Spike until the two of you could escape."

With a jolt, Angel thought back to how she had kissed him while he was in the torture chamber. Had Julian ordered her to do
>it? Was it all a part of the manipulative game she had to play as Darla? He had been so sureâ€¦
<p>

Refocusing on the other man, Angel's heart swelled with hope,
"Waitâ€¦if you're in contact with her, then you know where she
>is?"
<p>

A grim look on his face, Julian shook his head, "Unfortunately, no. I lost contact with her during the cave in. It was so
>unexpected that I fell out of formation and the spell we were performing backfired. I blame myself f-,"
<p>

Amy put a hand on his shoulder stopping him, "It was no one's fault. What we think happened is that Willow got knocked
>unconscious unexpectedly while in the hallway and that severed her connection to Julian."
<p>

"So she's dead?" Angel said softly, barely able to believe that the statement came out of his mouth.

"No," Whistler shook his head firmly, "Even though Julian lost contact with her, I didn't. She's most definitely still alive."

"What do you mean?"

"That's the rest of the story. Giving Willow an unlimited amount of information on Darla was one half of our plan. However, she
>also had to look the part. To get her to appear as a vampire we needed to use the usual spells and glamour. But, to give her the

strength and speed to back it up, she was sharing in my demon."
Whistler paused. "And as far as I can tell our bond is still

>intact. If she were dead, that wouldn't be the case."
<p>

"Can you pinpoint her location?"

"No. My connection isn't as specific as Julian's was. In time, though, I might be able to hone in on her."

"Why did you send her in alone?" This time, Angel couldn't conceal the accusation in his eyes, "Why not go in as a team?"

"We couldn't guarantee your survival if we just hit Spike's lair with brute force. We brought it up, as a matter of fact, and
>Willow vetoed it then and there. She wasn't willing to risk anything. This whole idea was pretty much hers."
<p>

"Besides," Buffy spoke up for the first time, "She didn't go in alone. I went in with her."

"What happened?"

The Slayer held up her still-bandaged wrists, "For most of the time, I was chained to her bed. Not very comfortable, might I
>add."
<p>

The vampire simply stared at her blankly.

Sighing, Buffy elaborated, "She used me to get into the building. I had left ahead of time so I didn't really know what the plan was. She took me by surprise and knocked me out. I'm guessing she presented me to Spike as a 'housewarming gift'." <p>

When Angel's eyes widened, the blonde girl held up her hand.

"I thought she was evil too, up until I tried the handcuffs she had me chained to the bed with. Remember the pair with the inside

>release latch we used to trick Faith?" <p>

Angel nodded.

"The ones she had on me were one and the same. She made sure I was put into her room and then scared the living daylights out of all of Spike's men so they left me alone. It wasn't until I got out of there that I had to deal with anyone but by then, I was almost free. It was so quiet outside that I almost got the impression she was off running interference in order to give me a

>chance to escape." <p>

His mind racing with all this new information, Angel closed his eyes and leaned back against the pillows that had been laid out for him. <p>

"We need to find her," he said softly.

"We will." Amy reaffirmed.

"I'm going to get her back, Whistler." The vampire opened his dark eyes and they were filled with determination, "I'm going in no matter what." <p>

"Right now you need to rest and we need to regroup," The demon responded, the tone of his voice allowing for no debate. >"Like I said, she's okay now, I can feel her." <p>

"But Spike-,"

"Won't lay a hand on her until she's immortal, Angel. Don't be stupid. He isn't about to risk everything now, even if he has

>figured out what we tried to do." <p>

Unconvinced, his protégé merely shook his head. "That still doesn't leave us a lot of time."

Whistler sighed, "We'll work with it. And believe me, until then she's okay. Confused and a little hurt, but overall, okay.

**

Spike couldn't help but smile.

Yes, he'd lost over half of his men in the recent destruction of his

lair.

Yes, he had also lost his only home.

But now, lounging in his new temporary abode-an abandoned apartment building, things were finally beginning to look up.

Willow sat across from him, a puzzled look in her pretty green eyes. She was bruised and scratched from her ordeal and had a
>nasty bump on her head but otherwise, she seemed all right.
<p>

"Darlaâ€|?" She murmured softly.

"That's right, pet." He responded tenderly, "Darla."

The name sounded vaguely familiar, yet foreign on her own tongue, "And you're sure that's what my name is?"

Letting out a short laugh, Spike leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek, "Sweetheart, I've known you for years. I'm
>positive." <p>

"And you'reâ€|Spike?" She asked, cocking her head to one side.

"Yes, pet, very good." Spike nodded at her, barely able to conceal his excited energy.

The vixen and her friends had tricked him once already. He didn't know how they'd trained Willow to act as Darla so well but
>it didn't matter. None of that pettiness mattered because they'd failed miserably and he still had exactly what he wanted. <p>

"And we'reâ€|vampires?"

"Yes, luv, sad but true."

In fact, he had more than what he'd originally wanted. In a few days she would be immortal and he would be able to turn her in

>actuality. But until then, he could play their game as well. For some reason or another, Willow's fall in the cave had wiped out

her memory. He had noticed it the instant he'd pulled her body from the rubble and she'd gazed upon him without any
>recognition or fear. Her mind was like a clean slate, just waiting for information to be etched upon it. He could mold her into

anything he wanted. The options were endless.

"And we live together in here?"

"Well, actually, pet, this is just somewhere to tide us over until we find a more comfortable place. Our old place was destroyed

>byâ€|hmmm, we'll talk about that some other time." Patting her cheek lightly, he stood up, 'Let's get you to bed now." <p>

Allowing herself to be lifted into his arms, she continued to stare up at him, her green eyes wide with curiosity, "So are

>weâ€|brother and sister? Like, related or something?" <p>

Spike paused in mid stride, to give her a pained look, "Whyâ€|noâ€|no we're not." He ducked his head and turned away as if
>to conceal the hurt in his eyes and she rushed on. <p>

"Oh gosh, I'm sorry if I've said something to-,"

"Don't worry, luv." He gently lowered her to the bed before sitting down next to her, "Your memory will come back
>eventually, I promise that." <p>

"I'm sorry, Spike. I must really be freaking you out right now seeing as how I can't remember anything."

"It's okay." He said softly, staring off at a corner of the room, lost in thought.

She placed a comforting arm on his shoulder, "Maybe if you tell me what our relationship was in the past, it'll help me to

>remember." <p>

There was a pause and he turned to look at her, his gaze seeming to pierce into her very soul.

Breaking eye contact, he stood abruptly.

"We were lovers, pet. You were my consort."

And with that, he placed a chaste kiss on her forehead before turning out the light and leaving the room.

"Goodnight, pet. Pleasant dreams."

To Be Continued.....

>

End
file.